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METHODS OF SATIRE IN THE POLITICAL DRAMA OF THE RESTORATION

Political satire in the Restoration drama can largely be classified under four headings, with reference to the method employed in inserting it in the plays. First, there is the parallel play, with its basis of real or feigned history, such as Dryden's *The Duke of Guise* and several of Crowne's and Southerne's plays. The purpose of this kind of play is to cast ridicule upon a party or faction by a display of the folly of their views in the action of the play. In this sense *Coriolanus* is a satire upon popular government. Such a play may be purely didactic. *Gorboduc*, for example, may be interpreted as a serious exposition of the misery arising from civil discord. The action may be subordinated to the introduction of caricatures of political opponents, as is the case with Crowne's *City Politics*. The parallel play may be comedy or tragedy. Rowe's *Tamerlane* is a tragedy, but it satirizes Louis XIV, in the person of Bajazet, by making him utterly ridiculous, and by contrasting him with the high-minded Tamerlane, William III.

Second, political satire in the drama often makes use of the typical character. The use of the typical character is a part of the classical theory of comedy, and, as such, was a part of the dramatic theory of Ben Jonson, who had great influence upon the political satire of the Restoration period.

From the typical character it is an easy step to the use of persons in the drama. Ben Jonson may not have introduced contemporary Puritan individuals into his comedies, but some of the Restoration dramatists had no hesitation about doing so. Besides, partisan warfare such as that which existed about 1680 is not likely to be free from personalities.

The fourth method employed consisted in the insertion of satirical remarks about political conditions or problems into the plays. Such remarks were often put into the mouths of unimportant characters, as was the case in *Eastward Hoe*, where the remarks that apparently gave most offense and landed the authors, Jonson, Chapman, and Marston, in jail, are spoken by an unimportant sea captain.

All four of these methods may exist in combination, or only one may be used in a given play. Dryden's *Albion and Albanius* and possibly *The Duke of Guise* employ all four of the methods in a single play. The comedy of manners, on the other hand, ordinarily contented itself with sneering comments about the Puritans.

The most important of the four methods is the parallel play, which appeared in great numbers. It was the favorite method of Dryden, Crowne, and Southerne, not to mention many inferior dramatists. This may be ascribed to two things: the taste for allegory, and the comparative safety of the method for the dramatist. The age of Dryden, it should be remembered, is the age of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the readers of which were, to be sure, of a very different class from that which frequented the theaters, and it precedes the age of *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels*. It is also the age of *Absalom and Achitophel* and *The Hind and the Panther*. It is not least among the times that loved allegory.

If the play is to be personal, the allegorical nature of the parallel play offers a very convenient refuge. The playwright may avow, as Dryden did in the case of *The Duke of Guise*, that the "play's a parallel" or he may deny that it has any significance whatever, as Southerne did in the case of *The Spartan Dame*, written about the time of the Revolution of 1688. The plot of Southerne's play is based upon the story of the expulsion of Leonidas by Cleombrotus, his son-in-law. This play was begun, it is needless to say, before William had succeeded to the throne formerly held by his father-in-law.

If the parallel play permitted the dramatist to equivocate about his intentions, it sometimes got him into trouble when no offense was intended. Dryden's *Cleomenes* may not be a parallel play at all, but it gave offense to Queen Mary, though her anger was apparently against certain passages and not against the nature of the plot. Tate's adaptation of *Richard II* met with as much disfavor from the court party as *Richard II* itself did from Elizabeth, when it was being used as a parallel play by Essex. Nor were Tate and Dryden the only sufferers. Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus*, in which the character in the title rôle represents, in some measure, Charles II, was stopped on the third night as anti-monarchical, though the play is

about as anti-monarchical as Corneille's *Cinna*. The play does contain some ridicule of kings, but it is spoken by Vindicius, a demagogue, who is evidently patterned after the tribunes of the people in *Coriolanus*.

The parallel play might be concerned only with presenting a principle or an institution, as was the case with Settle's *The Female Prelate*, in which the satire was directed against the Roman Catholic Church as an institution, the inference to be drawn from the play being that what was once true of the church was still true, even though the methods of the church might have changed. Or the satire in the parallel play might be largely directed against individuals, as was the case with Crowne's *City Politics*, in which the Neapolitan setting and the Italian names form an almost transparent disguise for Shaftesbury, Oates, and others, or in Southerne's *Loyal Brother*, the action of which takes place in Persia, but the villain which is Shaftesbury.

All such political plays are allegorical in their nature, as was the prophet Nathan's story of the ewe lamb. In fact, the quintessence of the satire of the early eighties may be found in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. But such plays seldom passed into such undiluted allegory as Dryden's *Albion and Albanus*, in which we take leave of the machinery of history and romance, and adopt that of the mask or opera.

Ward says, in his *A History of English Dramatic Literature*, that, in the time of the Restoration, "No voice—except that of Milton prophesying in his days of darkness—was heard to protest against this servility of sentiment—to the Crown."¹ We need to know more about the real meanings of the parallel plays to be able to accept this statement. True, most of the dramatists favored the Crown, but Pepys considered Robert Howard's *The Duke of Lerma* a satire upon one of the prerogatives of Charles II.² He also records the furious anger of the king over Edward Howard's *The Change of Crowns*,³ the exact nature of which play we do not know, though it seems to have had elements of the parallel play.

¹ Second Edition, Vol. III, p. 293.

² Pepys's *Diary*, February 20, 1667-8.

³ *Ibid.*, April 15 and 16, 1667.

The genesis of the parallel play may be sought in the French romances, with their use of allegory, or in the plays of Pierre Corneille, the political nature of which was perfectly known to Dryden, who says in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, "Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*; they are not so properly to be called plays as long discourses of reason of state." It is not necessary, however, so far as the dramatists of the Restoration are concerned, to seek for French origins. The parallel political play had already existed in England before the Civil War. John Tatham does not figure largely in the standard histories of English dramatic literature. Ward gives him three lines in footnotes with mention of his name in the text and Professor Schelling devotes about fifteen lines to him in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. Nevertheless, he is important as a connecting link between the two divisions of the Stuart drama, and he illustrates more clearly than any other author of the period the methods and material of the dramatic satire of the Restoration.

In 1641 Tatham wrote *The Distracted State*. In this play Sicily of the time of Agathocles is put on exhibition to show that the professions of popular leaders are not to be trusted and that the whole nation suffers from any attempt to dethrone an established and legitimate royal family. The play is apparently not personal. The Scotch are satirized; so are all those who were not loyal to Charles I. Here was a parallel play before the Civil War, that employed the methods of *The Duke of Guise*, and, incidentally, some of the same arguments. And this play is not unique.

No one would, I suppose, seriously question the native English origin of typical, or "humour," satire, as applied to Puritans. The work of Ben Jonson, the creator of *Tribulation Wholesome* and *Zeal-of-the-Land Busy*, in this field is too well known to need comment. The relation of satire against the Puritans to political satire comes from the fact that the Puritan was politics: he was the chief problem with which the Crown had to deal from the beginning of the reign of James I onward. Ben Jonson recognized that fact, though he considered that the root of the perversity of the Puritan was in human nature itself. Probee, one of the characters in the Induction to *The Magnetic Lady*, says: "The reconciliation of

humours is a bold undertaking, far greater than the reconciliation of both churches, the quarrel between humours being ancients, and in my opinion, the root of all faction and schism in church and commonwealth."

From the time of Ben Jonson the Puritan was a stock figure in comedy. The tradition is continuous through Cartwright and other sons of Ben, Tatham, and Wilson to Shadwell. Moreover, when the Puritan appeared in the comedy of manners, which was but seldom, for the writers of the comedy of manners regarded the Puritan as "low," he showed Jonsonian traits. Traces of the manner of Ben Jonson may be found in Sir Nicholas Cully, a Puritan character of Etherege's first play, *The Comical Revenge*, and in Sir Samuel Forecast, of Sedley's *Mulberry Garden*. Mrs. Saintly, of Dryden's *Limberham*, is assuredly of the Jonsonian type. As late as 1709, almost exactly a hundred years after the appearance of *The Alchemist* with its Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome, Thomas D'Urfey produced the *Modern Prophets*, a play satirized in the *Tatler* (Nos. 1,4,11,43), in which D'Urfey ridiculed the Puritans in the good old Jonsonian way.

Since the Puritans detested plays, play actors, and playhouses at all times, it is easy to see that there was little love lost between them and the Royalist supporters of the theater. There are, however, three distinct degrees in the treatment of the Puritans as a comic figure. The Jonsonian figure, a canting hypocrite, decrying the things of the world and secretly enjoying them, a "humour" character, prevailed before 1642. Immediately after the Restoration, he reappeared as an even more maleficent figure, one given to casuistry, as Scruple, in Wilson's *The Cheats*, a minister who will "conform, reform, transform, perform, deform, inform, any form" for three hundred pounds a year, or to abuse of power, as Mr. Day, in *The Committee*. The playwrights had just endured a long period of Puritan rule and felt toward the Puritans about as a Russian *émigré* does toward Communists. In addition to these changes, the personal element figured to a great degree. Cromwell and his associates appeared in the drama in person, there to be held up to the execrations of an angry, exultant mob.

In the third period, the treatment of the Puritans is much more conventional. In the hands of Shadwell it returns to the

Jonsonian tradition. The Puritan was, for the most part, to be found in the ranks of the Whigs, after the parties took shape about 1680, but it is incorrect to think that the satire of that period against the Puritans is as malicious as that of the earliest period. Satire of the Puritans had some value to the Tory party, but, when it was employed, it was largely a matter of convention or imitation or downright plagiarism from older writers. The Tory dramatists were interested in Puritans just so far as Puritans were Whigs or just so far as they could cast contempt upon the Whigs by associating them with the frightful days of Cromwell. Professor Schelling, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*⁴ mentions two Tory satires of the eighties that illustrate the continued use of the Puritan as an object of satire: Crowne's *City Politics*,⁵ and Mrs. Behn's *The Roundheads*. The former is, however, only to a slight degree a satire upon the Puritans as Puritans; it is a personal assault upon Shaftesbury and his following. Such satire of the Puritans as exists is conventional, harking back to the sixties. Mrs. Behn's *The Roundheads* is her version of Tatham's *The Rump*. What she did was to eliminate the slight love affair of the original and substitute a large amount of intrigue, in which she was a specialist, invent conventional "humour" characters, such as Ananias Goggle, a Jonsonian Puritan, and treat Lady Cromwell more respectfully than the original did. The rest of the satire is, of course, Tatham's.

Although the Puritans were, for the most part, Whigs, satire of the Puritans was a distinct thing from satire of the Whigs. This is proved by the writings of Shadwell, who never ceased to satirize the Puritans. In his last play, *The Volunteers* (1693), he mingles ridicule of the Jacobites with ridicule of the Puritans in the person of an Anabaptist, Hackwell, who had served under Oliver. This character, as well as Scrape-All, of *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), was created by the man who had enraged the Tories, high and low, by his caricature of the High Churchman in the person of Smerk, the hypocritical chaplain of *The Lancashire Witches*.

⁴ Vol. VIII, p. 122.

⁵ The date of *City Politics* is 1683, not 1673, as it is printed on p. 122. See p. 188 of the same volume.

Ward says that the Restoration dramatists, "in their personal abuse of the enemies, real or supposed, of the cause with which they have identified themselves, add a new element . . . to the literature of the theater."⁶ The word *new* is undoubtedly too strong. Personal abuse on the stage is, of course, as old as Aristophanes. The War of the Theaters showed that the great Elizabethans were not wholly averse to personal satire. Shirley is said by Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, to have satirized persons about the court in his and Chapman's forbidden play, *The Ball* (1632). It is true that the amount of personal satire increased after the Restoration, and that it formed the chief feature of the early Tory satires of Crowne and Southerne.

Again, John Tatham is interesting as one who led the way. His *The Rump; or a Mirrour of the Late Times* (1660) is largely personal. The play is a caricature of the events in London between the death of Cromwell and the arrival of Monk. The characters are presented with only the thinnest of disguises, that is, disguise produced by a slight change of name. Lambert appears as Bertlam; Wareston, as Stoneware, and so on. The characters are treated with the greatest malevolence. Fleetwood is a canting hypocrite; Wareston is given to low trickery and ribaldry. The women fare no better than the men. Lady Lambert is domineering, revengeful, and, of course, unfaithful to her husband. Lady Cromwell is a coarse old vixen, who attempts to scratch Lady Lambert's face in return for a sneering remark. She raves over her troubles and predicts for herself a life as an oyster woman or bawd. The play is interesting not only as marking the high- or low-water mark of the personal in the Restoration drama, but is a joy to the source hunter, who can find therein not only reflections of Ben Jonson but imitations of Rabelais and Aristophanes, the father of the personal attack by means of comedy. The virulence and malignity of its portrait painting were not surpassed during the Age of the Restoration, though it fell to more skilled hands, such as Otway, Crowne, and Dryden, to depict Shaftesbury.

Only a word need be said about the practice of satirizing persons or principles in the dialogue itself. Ben Jonson had

⁶ *A History of English Dramatic Literature*, Second Edition, Vol. III, p. 293.

used no little amount of this kind of satire. His jail experience did not cure him of the habit. His contemporaries and successors, such as Shirley, Brome, Davenant, Mayne, and Killigrew continued his manner of poking fun at the Puritans in this way.

Such satire served one useful purpose in the Restoration drama. As has already been said, the writers of the comedy of manners would not, as a rule, use Puritan characters, because they were "low." Their "high bred" characters could, however, ridicule the Puritans. This is the principal political satire that appears in the comedy of manners. Dryden made extensive use of this method. In his first comedy, *The Wild Gallant*, there is a character who is an ex-Puritan, but little use is made of him as a "humour" character. The real satire comes from the allusions by other characters to the Rump Act and the "gude Scotch Kivenant."

As in the case of the heroic drama of the Restoration, which can be traced back, so far as its principal elements are concerned, to Fletcher and Marlowe, by way of D'Avenant, so the methods of the dramatic satirists of the Restoration go back to Ben Jonson and his contemporaries, by way of John Tatham, who resembles D'Avenant in connecting the old and the new. Satire of the Puritans was as old as Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, but it became bitter and personal just after the close of the Civil War, while the Puritan figures were looming so large in retrospect. It was only the ghosts of these figures, combined with the stock characters from the Jonsonian tradition, that were evoked during the stormy period of Shaftesbury's attempted domination of state affairs. This satire of the Puritans was undoubtedly used with a political purpose, but it must be distinguished from party satire. There was, on the whole, little that was new about the methods of the Restoration political drama, even if no other period has produced so much drama that "foamed with politics."

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